

Edgebrook Sauganash Chamber of Commerce

Why did the two organizations decide to merge?

This decision was a natural outcome of the two chambers working closely together over the years to serve the local business community with significant duplication of efforts. The topic arose when the officers of each chamber sat down together to explore ways of working more cooperatively in the future. The new organization, which will officially launch on April 1, is the end product of those conversations.

“Our goal is to better serve both business communities with a single organization serving as a business advocate to a geographic area with two distinctly separate but closely knit communities,” said Dennis Hammer, who will be the president of the new organization.

“We are reallocating our staff duties to eliminate redundancies and streamline the organization to ensure maximum service to both business communities,” said Barb Eastman, owner of Edgebrook’s Happy Foods, who will serve as vice president of the new organization.

“Everything from our membership list to the directors on each board was characterized by significant overlap,” Hammer added.

Weren’t the two chambers a single chamber sometime in the past?

Historically, the two organizations were one, until the Sauganash Chamber was created in 2004. Since they were split apart, the two chambers continued to work closely together on events and activities, ranging from educational business seminars to networking events.

Many businesses joined both groups and paid dues to each. Over time, it became apparent that by unifying resources, local businesses would benefit from a combined, stronger organization.

After several meetings between the executive boards, a vote was passed by the full board of directors of each chamber.

Where is the new organization’s office?

As a gesture to make sure that both the Edgebrook and Sauganash communities are given the same level of service, both offices will remain open in their current locations. In Edgebrook, the office is inside North Branch Arts at 5421 W. Devon. In Sauganash, the office is located in BQS Realty at 6023 N. Cicero Avenue.

Who will run the new organization?

The chamber will be run by a single board of directors, consisting of a combination of 15 members from both organizations. Jennifer Herren Gatesman will be the executive director, assisted by Andrea Simon in the role of business ambassador consultant and Nick Haak, as the business administrator consultant.

How was the new board structure determined?

A nominating committee consisting of the officers of each board reached the decision of how board members would be placed. Each organization was provided the opportunity to name 5 directors to the new board.

Here is the board of the new Edgebrook Sauganash Chamber of Commerce:

1. Individuals who formerly sat on both boards:

Jenise Celestin - Secretary
Dennis Hammer - President
Harriet Luden
Dr. Deanna Minkler – Vice President
Glenn Nadig

2. 5 Representatives from the Edgebrook Chamber:

Cindy Cannizarro
Marti Corcoran
Barbara Eastman – Vice President
Jillian Holly
Helmuts Lackajs

3. 5 Representatives from the Sauganash Chamber:

Adam Eckert
Bob Klairmont - Treasurer
Kelly Leggett
Bob Smith
Frank Spula

According to Dennis Hammer, those selected from each chamber were largely officers and the most senior members of each board. "Every board member who sat on the nominating committee was given the chance to assume an officer role," said Hammer, the group's new president. All the officers are affiliated with brick and mortar businesses in Edgebrook and/or Sauganash.

"We need to embrace the future but we also need to recognize our past and make sure that each community receives maximum benefits from the new Edgebrook Sauganash Chamber of Commerce," said Hammer, "It will take some time for all the details to be ironed out but we are confident that this new structure will provide optimal revenue generating, promotional and educational opportunities and assistance to the business community."

Why wasn't this brought to the entire board or members at large sooner?

There were many factors to consider, including whether or not this made sense. As leaders of the organizations, strategic vision and collaboration were of the utmost priority, with the only possible outcome being mandated by what is best for all businesses in both communities.

What benefits will be seen by businesses that join the new, combined Edgebrook Sauganash Chamber of Commerce?

Members of the new group will immediately get twice the coverage simply by the expansion of the community organization's boundaries. Social media, website and other resources will serve a larger, more diverse organization. Additionally, staff resources will be more robust, allowing a greater level of service to the business community.